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ABSTRACT

Henry Cisneros, speaking on the theme, "the colorful past and promising future of Hispanic heroes in Texas," in Amarillo, Texas, on February 7, 1989, was successful in eliciting a positive response from his Anglo/Hispanic audience. An analysis of Cisneros' use of narrative demonstrates its effectiveness in leading to a feeling of "community" by audience members. W. R. Fisher's narrative paradigm can be used to examine similarities and differences in the use of narrative demonstrated by Ronald Reagan and Henry Cisneros in their rhetoric. Cisneros' use of narrative was able to accomplish a unifying effect because of the cultural values he emphasized, as well as the heightened perception of Hispanic heros he gave his audience. Cisneros called for an end to the underclass, envisioning "a partnership enhancing education, setting a climate of high expectations for all students." Like Reagan, Cisneros demonstrated convincing presentational skills. By combining rational arguments, supported by statistics and demographic data, with effective stories, Henry Cisneros was successful in having the Amarillo audience share his vision of a "Texas in brotherhood," and in creating a sense of unity. (PRA)

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Hispanic Storyteller

Unity Through the Use of Narrative in the Speaking of Henry Cisneros

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Abstract

Henry Cisneros, speaking on the theme, "the colorful past and promising future of Hispanic heroes in Texas," in Amarillo, Texas, on February 7, 1989, was successful in eliciting a positive response from his Anglo/Hispanic audience. This paper analyzes Cisneros' use of narrative and its effectiveness in leading to a feeling of "community" by audience members. Fisher's Narrative Paradigm is discussed briefly, with the reservations of its applicability to rhetorical discourse. Similarities and differences in the use of narrative demonstrated by Ronald Reagan and Henry Cisneros in their rhetoric are also discussed. By using effective stories, along with demographic data, Cisneros was successful in creating a sense of unity.

Hispanic Storyteller:

Unity Through the Use of Narrative in the Speaking of Henry Cisneros

On February 7, 1989, San Antonio Mayor Henry Cisneros delivered an address in Amarillo, Texas, focusing on "the colorful past and promising future of Hispanic heroes in Texas" (Creative Mind Lecture Series Brochure). Demographics reveal that the Texas Hispanic community will become the majority ethnic group in the state by the twenty-first century (Brochure). With his articulate style and broad historical knowledge, Cisneros was successful in "pushing home the fact that Texas' Hispanic population is growing," while at the same time, he also allayed "the fears of the traditional 'white'majority" (Canyon News, Feb. 9, 1989). His success seemed to stem, in part, from the skillful use of narrative. Weaving in the stories of Hispanic heroes in his address, he was able to create a fabric appealing to both Hispanic and Anglo sensibilities and build a common ground between them. In analyzing Cisneros' address it seems apparent that his storytelling was able to structure the reality for this audience and give a unified response. Perhaps the power of his storytelling is what had helped him build a "broad based coalition for change" in San Antonio between Anglos and Chicanos (Current Biography, 1987).

Cisneros had used storytelling successfully in other speeches which asked for a unified following. In his July 17, 1984 address to the Democratic National Convention, Cisneros told the story of an 80-year-old San Antonio resident who stopped him on the street

and told him "just do a good job and be fair" (Diehl and Jarboe, 1984). Cisneros used this example to show his audience that the Democratic Party should be united in its commitment to a policy of "fairness." Later on March 10, 1986, Mayor Cisneros, addressing the National League of Cities, called for a united effort to lobby against proposed cuts in federal aid to cities, using references to "a powerful story of America" and "stories such as those of Baltimore and Boston, and Indianapolis and Cleveland" (Peterson, 1986). But it is in the Amarillo address that Cisneros' reliance on narrative is most clearly seen.

The study of narrative with its classical roots in Greece and Rome has been explored by contemporary critics (Foss, 1989). One of the most widely studied approaches was advocated by Walter R. Fisher. Fisher (1985) asserted "the narrative paradigm sees people as storytellers." Fisher formulated a "narrative paradigm" in which the key components of "narrative probablity" and "narrative fidelity" cause audiences to "accept stories because they find a truth in them and use those stories to validate belief and behavior" (Rybacki, 1991). This is echoed by Livo and Rietz (1986) who declared: "in the hands of a competent storyteller we discover that we are all one community" and that through storytelling "we are obliged to acknowledge our shared humanity."

However, deficiencies have been pointed out in applying the narrative paradigm to **all** discourse. Rowland (1987) emphasized "the narrative paradigm works quite well when applied to works

that are stories" but that "it has little application to works that do not explicitly tell . . . a story." Lucaites and Condit (1985) stressed the significance of the context and the rhetor's purpose when examining rhetorical narratives. In their analysis, "the rhetorical narrative serves a point: the unified purpose of the discourse to enact an interest that exists outside of its textualization." Warnick (1987) warned that the narrative paradigm is limited by the "value choices" made by the critic applying the critical method. She expressed concern that "a rhetorical narrative may ring true in the lives of particular audience members . . . and nevertheless be a bad story," citing Mein Kampf as an example. McGee and Nelson (1985) on the other hand, suggested that storytelling can "reintroduce morality effectively into public discourse," noting that "moral storytelling" can be considered "the wish and search for community . . . all one blood but many minds."

This creation of "community" seems to be one of the desired outcomes of Henry Cisneros as he discussed Hispanic heroes. His task was to pay tribute to the many contributions of the Hispanic people to Texas, and at the same time stimulate respect and honor for those heroes among an audience composed of both Anglo and Hispanic listeners. The sponsorship of the lecture reveals the variety of groups present: Texas A & M Exes Club, Los Barios de Amarillo, the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Amarillo College, and the Texas Committee on the Humanities (Canyon News, Feb. 9, 1989). Cisneros' personal approach to politics has been identified by his biographers as "a unifer and coalition-

builder" (Diehl and Jarboe). So the variety in backgrounds presented by the Amarillo audience was something Cisneros was skilled in handling.

As he began his speech, Cisneros declared: " . . . let me say with respect to the story of our state, that the Hispanic peoples are in great measure responsible for the fact that Texas exists in the way that it is today." His use of inclusive language, as well as the knowledge he demonstrated in recounting early Texas history helped establish his credibility. He secured a favorable audience response early in the address when he referred to the television mini-series, "Lonesome Dove," being broadcast that night. The audience responded with laughter when Cisneros reminded them: "All of you that are here tonight are missing the third episode of 'Lonesome Dove.'" Using "Lonesome Dove" as a frame of reference, Cisneros then told his audience about Jose Antonio Navarro, a signer of the Texas Declaration of Independence and Tarevio la Soya and Juan Sequin, Hispanic heroes of the Alamo.

From the Alamo to present day heroes, Cisneros had his audience consider the lives of Gus Garcia and Henry B. Gonzalez. He identified Gus Garcia as a "classmate of John Connally" who argued a case before the Supreme Court. In relating the story of Gus Garcia, Cisneros painted a picture of the "tradition of South Texas towns with the main street going down the middle and the railroad track on the side," of the "Mexican town" and the "Anglo town." It was against this setting that Cisneros told of

Garcia's court battle to allow Hispanics to be buried in the "same cemeteries in South Texas as those with whom they had fought." Using the "American Dream" myth, but applying it to Hispanic Congressman Gonzalez, Cisneros chronicled the rise of Gonzalez from a worker for the San Antonio Housing Authority to his successful election to the United States Congress, the first Hispanic American to serve in Congress. In both of these narratives, the "hero" mentioned encountered racial prejudice and successfully combated it. Cisneros skillfully chose stories which illustrated the triumph of the underclass. From the specific stories, he then lead his audience to the following generalizations: ". . .that's the American way, it's the American system. It rewards diligence and sincerity and honesty and integrity." Again, the sense of "community" was stressed as Cisneros focused on the "American way."

When Cisneros turned from present day Hispanic heroes to consider those of the future, he asserted: "There will be many Hispanic heros in the future." He listed areas of influence including religion, education, business, and banking, but refused to talk about "individuals." Instead, he focused on the "mass movement" that would be created by Hispanic heroes, citing demographic data which showed California would experience "a fundamental, demographic, and cultural transformation of the leading state population . . . in America." He emphasized to the audience the nature of their interdependence with Hispanic citizens by

using a lifeboat analogy he claimed to have told "the people in San Antonio frequently":

> . . .you got to think about a city--for that matter a state--as if it were a lifeboat and we're out on a stormy sea together. And if your end of the boat springs a leak then I have every interest in helping you fix that leak. Because although you may be in the water first, and I may not regard that as a horrible thing, the fact of the matter is that I'm going to be in the water shortly after you. And, as a result if I want to keep that from happening, I have to help you fix your end of the boat just like you have to help me fix my end. And that's the way cities work. And that's the way states work.

From the "togetherness" motif, Cisneros stated his coalition-building argument: "This whole question of demographics and the Hispanic future has now transcended what you would call a concern merely about civil rights. . . . What we're really talking about now, is how does Texas compete?" Calling for an end to the underclass, Cisneros cited statistics which revealed the cost to Texas of not properly educating its citizens. He called for "a partnership enhancing education, setting a climate of high expectations for all students, making it unacceptable and unpopular to perpetuate failure."

The San Antonio Education Partnership was used by Cisneros to show how cooperation between businesses and public schools with a high drop-out rate had resulted in a marked increase in school attendance and in better academic grades. To illustrate the success of this program, Cisneros related the story of a young boy who had been in a motorcycle accident the previous day. The principal walked up to the boy and suggested that perhaps the student should have stayed home another day. The student replied, according to Cisneros, "Are you kidding? I've got a contract with the mayor to go to college if I come to school."

Cisneros, not only called for a united effort to reform educational efforts, but he went on to ask his audience to unite in supporting programs designed to aid in economic development and in meeting health concerns and needs of the "underclass." Using inclusive language and the "American Dream" myth again, Cisneros urged his audience:

> I think it's critical that we try to understand that the task of those who would call themselves heroes is not just to penetrate in solo fashion like that bright shooting star across the sky. But rather to have the stamina, and the endurance, and the compassion, and the capability to create a mass movement of people into the middle class. See this is not some radical movement--Hispanic Americans--nor some unfathomable and strange alien force. It is a repetition of the American story played

out one more time.

Cisneros spoke of the immigrants who settled America and then reminds his audience: "It's the same story played out one more time in the American story. Only this time with a difference. Many . . . are not immigrant at all. . .they were here very early and their offspring . . . are today populating the American Southwest."

Revealing his awareness of successful Hispanic legislators currently serving in Texas, Cisneros predicted "We'll see those heroes and heroines as political leaders." He then returned to focus again on education by citing Jaime Escalante's example as portrayed in the movie "Stand and Deliver," which he claimed was "a wonderful, marvelous, inspiring tale of Hispanic commitment to education overcoming tough odds." He used the concept of united effort following this reference, mentioning "community": "Now this is the story . . . of Hispanic heroes and it's a story of a heroic effort that transcends individuals but becomes a community-wide and Texas-wide initiative."

The final portion of Cisneros' address emphasized the equal statue of Hispanic heroes with such Anglo heroes as Jim Bowie, David Crockett, Sam Houston, Lyndon Johnson, and John Connally. Appealing to his audience's Texas heritage, Cisneros asked them to consider the closing lines of the state song, "Texas, Our Texas." He recounted hearing the song sung by some San Antonio school children, "little brown skinned children, Mexicanos," and their

lack of understanding of "ages long." He ended the address by telling the audience that the important cause they share is the "future of Texas and the Mexican American story in Texas, in brotherhood with all of the other peoples who make up this state."

CONCLUSIONS

Lewis (1987) in his analysis of narrative form in the Reagan Presidency concluded that "narrative structure is fragile because the requirement of internal consistency is permanent, while the ability of people responding to events to maintain that consistency is inevitably partial and temporary." He further stated that Fisher's assertion of the moral superiority of the narrative paradigm is not confirmed." Cisneros, like Reagan, relied heavily on narratives and myths to create unity in his audience. Unlike Regan's rhetoric, Cisneros grounded his remarks with a wealth of demographic data and a litany of specific Hispanics whom he deemed as "heroes." His educational and political background lent credibility to his recommendations. Although he used "story," as Reagan did to "give meaning to America," Cisneros did not separate himself from his narrative, or "detach" himself from the policies he was advocating, as Lewis noted was typical of the Reagan presidency. Cisneros, by using storytelling was able to create a feeling of "community" in his audience.

In evaluating Reagan's rhetoric, Fisher (1987) observed:

> A persuasive story and character cannot be merely subversive . . . they must be true to the past, cultural values, provide

a heightened perception of the people and presented with consummate skill.

Indeed, Henry Cisneros' use of narrative was able to accomplish a unifying effect because of the cultural values he emphasized,as well as the heightened perception he gave his audience of Hispanic heroes. Like Reagan, Cisneros demonstrated convincing presentational skills. His references to popular mass media--"Lonsome Dove" and "Stand and Deliver" and his use of humor was well received. His articulate and enthusiastic delivery kept the audience spellbound for almost an hour. By combining rational arguments, supported by statistics and demographic data, with effective stories, Henry Cisneros was successful in having the Amarillo audience share his vision of a "Texas in brotherhood."

Author Notes

The manuscript of Cisneros' Amarillo address was transcribed from an audiotape by Amarillo College Language and Communication Departmental secretary, Brenda Turner.

A videotape of the address is filed with Instructional Services at Amarillo College. Requests for copies of the manuscript or videotape may be sent to Trudy Hanson, West Texas State University Art, Communication, and Theatre Department, WT Box 747, Canyon, Texas 79016.

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